

the seventh seal



interviews with spares and
nova

dark stories, illustrations and
poems, including work from
Brian Stableford

issue 5: £1.99, or nearest equivalent

Hello, Good Evening, and...yes well, for the select few who may have noticed, there has been a bit of a hiatus since the last edition of *The Seventh Seal*. However the vast pile of CDs awaiting review demanded Action. Despite a certain dearth of promised answers to scribbled interview questions, the rusty tip from the *Poison Quill's* ancient nib has once been pushed into feverish, spidery activity.

So here you are - now you can read yet another opinion on that new release you spent your pocket money on this time last year, along with some more recent critiques.

Have fun and be happy

Poison Quill
Budapest

Hungary

nexus10@live.com

<http://www.com.geocities/SoHo/Exhibit/5981/>



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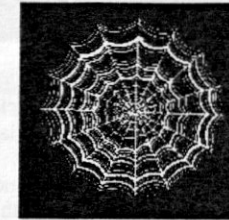
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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GOLDILOCKS 2: THIS TIME IT'S PERSONAL!

by Brian Stableford



Now children, it seems that when I told you the story of Goldilocks and the three bears yesterday I forgot to attach a moral to the story. In order to make up for that omission, today I'm going to tell you what happened after Goldilocks ran away from the three bears' house. When Goldilocks first heard the three bears crashing through the forest in hot pursuit she was sure that she was going to be caught, ripped apart and devoured, but after a while the sounds died away and she reached home safely.

When she told her father what had happened he was annoyed with her. "You can't go into strange houses, sit in chairs and eat porridge," he told her, sternly. "And if you do, you certainly shouldn't go to sleep in an upstairs bedroom afterwards. Not without opening the window and rigging a rope-ladder, anyhow." Her father, whose name was Dread - although he wasn't a judge -knew about such things. "Next time you go for a walk," he added, as an afterthought, "you'd better take one of my sub-machine-guns and my Swiss Army knife."

Goldilocks always did as she was told, so on the following day, before she went out for her daily walk in the woods, she put her father's Swiss Army knife in her pocket and slung his second-best sub-machine-gun over her shoulder.

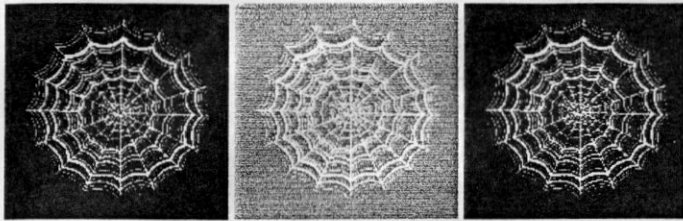
She decided to go to the three bears' house and apologise for her rude behaviour, but as she was retracing her steps through the forest a huge hole opened up in the ground and a giant trap-door spider leapt out. When I say that it was a giant spider I'm not exaggerating; it was twice as big as Daddy Bear. It was a female. (Female spiders are always bigger and deadlier than males.) Goldilocks was terrified.

"Well, well, well," said the spider, looking down at the little girl with all thirty-six of her beady eyes, "if it isn't my favourite piece of bear-bait."

"I don't know what you mean," said Goldilocks, wondering whether she could get the sub-machine-gun into a firing position before the spider's massive jaws cut her in two.

"You came this way yesterday," the trap-door spider reminded her. "I was just about to leap out and grab you when I heard those bears chasing after you. Oh ho! I thought. Why not let the little skinny one go and grab the other three. So I did. Wasn't easy, mind. One spider against a whole family of bears might have been a close run thing, but I've been studying kung fu. It's amazing what you can do with kung fu when you have eight legs to kick with."

Goldilocks managed to dislodge the sub-machine-gun from her shoulder, but as soon as she



levelled it the spider demonstrated her expertise in kung fu by kicking it out of her hands and backheeling it through the trap-door that led to her underground lair.

"Today, on the other hand," the spider said, "I notice that there's nobody chasing you at all." Perhaps I could arrange something," Goldilocks offered. "I don't think so," the spider said. "I've got a thousand eggs in my lair, and they're just about ready to hatch. Not that I don't trust you, of course."

Goldilocks could tell that the spider was being sarcastic. "It's bit ungrateful, isn't it?" she said. "Yesterday I lead three nice fat bears right to the entrance of your trap-door--and what do I get in return?" "I'm a spider," the spider told her. "Spiders don't do gratitude."

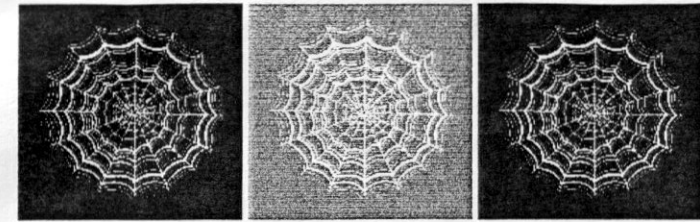
The spider bundled Goldilocks through the trap-door and took her down to the larder where the three bears were trussed up in spidersilk. They looked at her reproachfully.

"Look what I've got," the spider said to the three bears. "Another tasty little morsel for the kiddies." "Oh, just kill us all and get it over," said Daddy Bear. "There's no hurry," said the spider. "I want you nice and fresh for hatching time. I'll turn you all to nice warm porridge when the time is right." Then she looked at Goldilocks again. "You seem tired, dear. Would you like to rest a while?" "Yes please," said Goldilocks.

The spider immediately spewed out a jet of liquid spidersilk, which hardened on exposure to the air into a solid thread. The spider wound the thread around Goldilocks until she was trussed as tightly as the three bears and then hung her up by a single thread from the roof of her lair. "Well," said the spider, "I, afraid I don't have any chairs--hard, soft or otherwise. This is how my guests relax. Make yourself at home--I've got more hunting to do."

When the spider had gone Goldilocks said to the three bears: "I'm really, really sorry I got you into this mess." "It wasn't your fault," said Daddy Bear. "We over-reacted. Besides which, three of us should have been able to take care of one lousy spider. She was carrying a lot of extra weight, because she'd only just finished eating the father of her children. Kung fu or no kung fu, we're a disgrace to mammalkind." "What did the spider mean about turning you to porridge?" Goldilocks asked. "Not just us, dear," Mummy Bear told her. "You too, I'm afraid. Spiders can't eat solid food. Instead of using their stomach acids internally, as we mammals do, they inject

their digestive juices into their victims, turning their flesh to liquid. She has to time it just right if she wants us to be just right for her thousand children--not too slushy, not too cold." "That's disgusting," Goldilocks said. "It's the way of the world," said Daddy Bear, philosophically. "Is that a sub-machine-gun you dropped on your way in?" inquired Baby Bear. "It's a pity you didn't get to use it" "Aha!" said Goldilocks. "Little did the spider know that I also have a Swiss Army knife. I'll have us all out of this in a trice, and then we'll see how useful her kung fu kicks are against three bears with a score to settle and a little girl with a sub-machine-gun."



She was as good as her word. Her nimble fingers extricated the knife from her pockets, opened six of its blades, and made short work of the threads that were binding her. She made an immediate start on the threads binding Baby Bear, but the spidersilk in which he was encased had had much longer to harden and it was much tougher. Goldilocks had barely made a start when the trap-door opened again and the mother spider--somewhat inconvenienced by the dead weight of the anaesthetized stag she was carrying--began to squeeze through. Goldilocks had no choice but to go for the gun. She threw herself forward into a series of three somersaults, just like Lara Croft, ending the last one by snatching up the sub-machine-gun and ramming the barrel into the giant spider's mouth just as it reached for her with its terrible jaws.

Rat-a-tat-a-tat went the sub-machine-gun. The spider's had exploded. There were eyes everywhere.

"Hurrah for mammalkind!" cried the three bears. But it wasn't over yet. Suddenly, an egg cracked, spilling a little spider on to the floor of the lair. Another followed, and another and another and another.....until there were a thousand of the little horrors, all of them swarming over the ground towards Goldilocks. Goldilocks levelled the sub-machine-gun and opened up, spraying that fire in every direction. Because it wasn't a movie sub-machine-gun the weapon ran out of bullets long before Goldilocks had fired a thousand rounds, because the ammunition clip only held two hundred, but Goldilocks went right on killing baby spiders, stamping on them with her neatly-shod feet and slashing them with the six open blades of her Swiss Army knife. It took her ten minutes, but she destroyed every last one.

Then she went to cut the three bears loose. As soon as they were free they fell upon her, ripped her apart with their teeth and devoured her. "I was so hungry!" said Daddy Bear. "Should we start on the stag now, or take it home for the freezer?" "The meat was a rather tough, for a little girl," Mummy Bear complained. "In my young days, little girls were much more tender, and a lot sweeter." "Well," said Baby Bear, "I guess we've all learned that things can't always be just right."

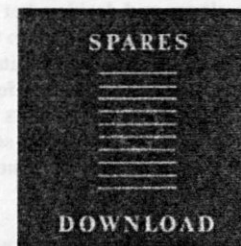
But that isn't the moral I promised you when the story began, children. The real point I'm trying to make here is that even though a fairy-tale heroine carrying a sub-machine-gun is a trifle implausible, it's a hell of a lot more likely than a grateful bear.



.....good things come in small packages

INTERVIEW WITH SPARES

In the second edition of this incredibly well-read, well-circulated and lavishly-presented zine, I reviewed 'Tired and Bizarre,' the debut album from Spares, which rose from the ashes of the now defunct Children on Stun. I was impressed with what I saw as its ability to stray away from the old tired cliches of so-called goth music. Since then, Spares have been busy, with two promos to herald the coming new release. Simon Manning agreed to answer a few hasty questions....



Please tell me about your forthcoming album release, and how it evolves from your last album. The new album from SPARES is called DOWNLOAD. At the moment i am in the process of sorting out a record deal for its release within Europe and the U.S.A, which i hope will be confirmed soon.

I think personally the album sounds very Gothy but done in a completely up to date way. Compared to my debut album it has more of a solid structure to it and as i am only working with one vocalist this time around the sound has more of a coherent feel to it, unlike my debut album where many of the tracks were very experimental musically which meant loads of various styles being used, some successfully others not so.

What is the relationship between Spares and your band's previous incarnation as Children on Stun?

The relationship is one of good friends. Ex STUN members Neil and Kyle are in their own group. But both provided vocals on my debut album, and currently Neil is producing DOWNLOAD for me. So i guess you could say our paths still cross in a musical way but not in a band way.

How do you think the goth scene has developed in the UK? How have things changed from the mid-90's? Has the atmosphere changed much from old times, would you say?

To be honest with you i have no idea what has changed within the goth scene musically or non musically. 1998 was the last time i had contact with the hardcore scene i can only imagine the U.K goth scene has mutated and probably more underground than what it was in the mid 1990s

Although i have gained some good exposure in Germany and the U.S.A so i would say their goth scenes are probably more kicking at the present time. I would also imagine that some of the atmosphere created must have gone as there simply is not enough talent coming through or great tracks being released any more.

Is it a drawback not to have a full-time vocal frontman?

On the debut album no it was not, as i have already said because of the different kinds of tracks i was writting i did not mind using so many vocalists. However, saying that i am only using one vocalist this time around. Next time around it could be different again. As SPARES are a musical project and not a band you have some flexibility to move around in and more freedom in a musical sense.

The most noticeable thing about your last album was its eclecticism. How has the response been overall to this new sound - or have you come across bigotry from the formulists?

When i look back after the break up of the Stun, i suppose for the first time in my musical carer i had the chance to record a solo album and decide what kind of tracks i felt like doing. Children On Stun were always labelled a goth band, so when the chance came along, and having played one style of music for many years, i think its only natural to try various styles of music but i still wrote the tracks in a dark sounding format. Overall i was pleasantly surprised in people's reactions. Most of the reviews were positive but because it was so varied people did not know where they stood with the sound and its strange feel. I still dont know what to make of it and i wrote the album. Some days i think its good, other days i wondered how the hell i wrote those tunes.

What would you say to those individuals who would say that you were not goth?

When you are younger its all about hair, clothes and clubs. As you get older you feel it from the heart or simply leave the scene and find something else to do. I played in one of the UK's largest Goth bands of the 1990s and i felt like an individual at the time, and i still do now. I don't care if people think of me as a goth or not, although i still have black hair if that counts and listen to the MISSION.

Do you have any plans to travel abroad?

Not yet no, at least not on a musical level. i have just come back from Sweden and visited Wales recently. (Is Wales 'abroad?' Still, with the ongoing tendency towards decentralisation, it might just get to be if you are a visitor from England.)

Does your home town Hastings shape the sound of your music at all? What kind of a community is there, there? Does it compare at all with that of Brighton?

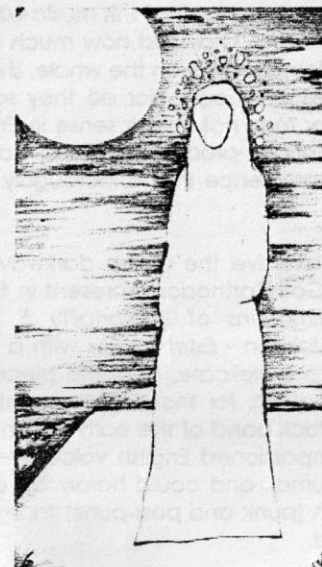
The town used to help shape some of the Stuns old sound but probably more in a lyrical way: most of "MONDO WEIRD" is about the town. (So I gathered. For those readers who do not know, the last track on 'Tired and Bizarre' has refences to Aleister Crowley, who died in Hastings. The town all seemed tediously new-agey to me when I was last in the UK, with its share of small-minded little psychic shops, but otherwise has no engaging sense of evil. It's just a nice old dormitory seaside town. Still, it has inspired at least one gothic - or post-gothic ban - so it must have something. ed.) In the time i have lived in Hastings it has always had a large alternative community. During the late 1980s the town had about 500 goths.

That is certainly not how I remember Brighton, when I was there in the mid-late 90's so I guess I must take your word for it.

Simon seems to be a bit shy of cameras these days, and pictures did not appear to be forthcoming, but hopefully the sleeve of the forthcoming release should provide some interest.

DON'T ASK WHY

Poem, by AC Evans



You cannot be as others are
I do not see you as others do

You cannot love as others
love

I don't deny your shattered
dreams.

You cry out across the
barren wastes
Somehow you cannot find
the key
Yet convulsive desire scalds
the mind

- don't ask why there is no
destiny.

I cannot be as others are
You do not see me as others do

I have never loved as others
love

Will you deny my hopeless
dreams?

IN PRAISE OF SHADOWS

reflections on Italian darkwave by Norman Jope

Readers of **The Seventh Seal** will be aware of just how much has been going on in Italy over the last few years. Not that this music will necessarily reach the UK markets in a big way - we all know just how much of a problem this is for non-English language performers and, on the whole, the Italians are justifiably happy to sing in their own language. Nor do they saddle themselves with English names that may, or may not, make sense in English - a questionable enterprise at best, and a counter-productive one at worst. This, in itself, implies a level of confidence... confidence that is thoroughly merited by the range and quality of the music.

I first realised just how subversive the Italian darkwave scene could be, in relation to any notion of Goth "orthodoxy" present in the UK, on hearing the Energiea compilation *Intimations of Immortality 5*. There's one track in particular, by the band Albireon - *Estel* begins with a spoken intro in Italian, before blossoming out into a delicate, acoustic piece that could easily be from an early PFM album (PFM, for those unacquainted, were the highest-profile Italian progressive rock band of the early Seventies). Whilst the track is not helped by an over-impassioned English voice-over towards its end, it is atmospheric, gently nocturnal, and could hardly be any further away from the alleged origins of goth (punk and post-punk) than if it had been a prog-rock track from that period.

An acquaintance with progressive rock is clear from other material since encountered. Italy was always a place where it was well-received - there was a thriving national scene, and bands at the intellectual end of the progressive rock spectrum, such as Van Der Graaf Generator and King Crimson, sold better there than anywhere else. It seems as if a number of Italian darkwave bands are not afraid of this influence. There is certainly a neo-progressive slant to Ataraxia's work - the sinister tango and Berlin-cabaret vocals of *Zweistimmens-Tauschung*, for example, could almost be the work of Amon Duul II, and the chord sequence is reminiscent of Peter Hammill's *Rock and Role*. Peter Hammill, the lead singer and main composer of Van Der Graaf Generator, certainly prefigures darkwave on many occasions - the grand guignol of *The Lie* (based on Bernini's *Ecstasy of St. Theresa*) and the proto-dark folk of *The Comet*, *The Course*, *The Tail* are just two examples.

Perhaps musicians, above all else, are what they listen to - the prospects for originality increase when they listen more extensively and more openly than their fellow-musicians. It seems that the Italian scene is full of wide-open listeners. In addition to the progressive rock aspects, there are of course the medieval influences too - and it is reasonable to point out just how much pre-

Renaissance music influenced some progressive rock musicians, and, even more so, some of the RIO (Rock in Opposition) bands, like Univers Zero and Art Zoyd, that picked up that thread at the end of the Seventies. Ataraxia's *Anno Domini MDLVI* is a convincing medieval pastiche but, perhaps, *Lupercalia's Normandia* is even more effective in evoking the kind of atmosphere that we would think of as "medieval". With its careful juxtaposition of up-tempo passages and introspective, contemplative interludes, *Normandia* presents a compelling portrait of the dynamics within medieval society. Perhaps it's not surprising that a country with such visible historical depth as Italy produces neo-medieval music of this calibre, although the traces of medieval society and culture are obviously accessible in other European lands.

In the UK, the history of modern music is often seen as discontinuous - there's one trend, then another, then another, and the new trends can be used to discredit those that have only recently passed. The advent of punk in 1976 produced the most violent rupture so far - the music of the recent past, particularly progressive rock, was ridiculed, caricatured and discredited, and this can still prevent it getting a fair hearing in some quarters. Of course, within a couple of years, the limitations of back-to-basics punk were outgrown, by bands such as Joy Division and Siouxsie and The Banshees, in ways that brought them closer to the progressive ethos than they might have admitted. Moreover, one could argue that the whole 4AD scene was, in fact, much more of a restatement of those earlier values than of those of punk! The ambient quality of bands like The Cocteau Twins, This Mortal Coil and Dead Can Dance, and the romantic nature of their music, is many miles away from the iconoclastic aggression of the punk tradition as such.

Nova, a new Italian band reviewed in this issue, develop the 4AD legacy more strongly than any band I have heard in recent years. Their debut release, *Utopica Musa*, combines exquisite female vocals that are both sensual and ethereal (like those of Liz Fraser, in a different way) with a musical language that relates to that tradition strongly, as well as to more recent bands such as Portishead. However, they add a fresh ingredient to the mix, which makes this CD exceptional - whereas Dead Can Dance drew upon the riches of Near Eastern music, Nova go further east on some tracks, into the Arab and Islamic world, in order to give their music a distinct flavour. The results, particularly on the track *Un' Idea Libera*, are astonishing, suggesting a whole new set of possibilities, a music that, indeed, is liberated from the merely European. Again, Romeo Cosser and Chiara Ferrari - the two members of Nova - have had the courage to listen and learn, and the result is a classic. Ashram are another group that draws its inspiration from this "feminised" tradition of modern music, and this leads to a music that is refined, wistful, even religious in character - a music with no hint of the brute to it. This is especially welcome listening in England, a land where the brute reigns increasingly supreme.

It is as if the Italian darkwave culture were uniquely equipped to draw in and develop a whole range of musical influences. And even a relatively straight-ahead goth band like Artica benefit from this. Few bands have manipulated the classic goth formulae with such structural awareness and musical intelligence - tracks like *Honiria*, from their first release, and *Penere* from their second, provide template examples of what can still be done within the genre whilst making it sound fresh. They are certainly no copyists, either - whilst the likes of The Fields of the Nephilim, Killing Joke and Joy Division figure in the mix of influences, amongst others, they create a soundscape which is quite their own. As with the Nicoise band Corpus Delicti, there is a subtle "Mediterranean" flavour to this, the result of the particular timbres that are used, and the hints of local roots music that appear from time to time - however, they acquire extra power by singing in their own language. It is only Anglocentrism that prevents them from being regarded more widely as a band of exceptional calibre.

Vidi Aquam are another remarkable Italian band, and they seem, more than most (although there are traces of influence in Gothica and other bands), to have picked up something from the "occultural" music of the Eighties and early Nineties. This music appeared, on the whole, in a parallel realm to classic goth, although there were crossovers - notably The Fields Of The Nephilim, who often covered the same conceptual ground in a more rock-oriented way (and Carl McCoy obviously knows his Magick, too, in Theory and in Practice). As far as Vidi Aquam go, there are hints of Mother Destruction and Coil, and even of the obscure, yet influential London band Feast of Hunger. And, of course, the whole dark folk current, in Italy and elsewhere, owes much to the acoustic output of Current 93.

So the current darkwave scene in Italy is remarkable for its openness, its eclecticism and its sense of adventure. It draws on a wide range of musical styles, whilst also forging another link in a musical chain that includes both the best progressive rock music of the Seventies (and beyond) and the sophisticated post-punk, post New Wave musics that followed. Classic goth influence is part of the mix, but to label the scene as goth would be missing the point. Nor would it be sensible to pigeonhole the best new darkwave and dark folk bands from other parts of Europe in this way, bands, for example, like Engelstaub, No Pain At Midsummer Night, Moon Far Away, Lady Morphia, Corvus Corax, Lacrimosa (at least before they got into pomp rock) and Neutral... to do so would be to render the term devoid of meaning.

Although it is certainly still possible to produce effective music within the conventions of goth, those who simply copy the old forms are unlikely to evolve beyond the limitations of tribute bands. Those who set out to mock, on the other hand, in order to bask in post-modern ironies, will either reveal themselves as connoisseurs of camp or brain-dead party animals, depending on how they develop the raw material - in most cases, probably, the latter.

But what the Italian scene offers - as well as the other bands mentioned - is the promise and the fulfilment of much more.

So does it make sense for darkwave and goth to be so closely aligned, or is this just a convention?

I believe that there is, in fact, an overwhelming argument in favour of alignment, but one that might blow open the pages of magazines like this to other music, too. It is possible that we already have too many descriptors, crowding against each other and creating false distinctions and exclusions, and that it does music no favours at all to treat it in this way. If we are to have boundaries, then it might be wiser to draw them on the basis of the conceptual frameworks that underlie music, rather than on the basis of specific musical effects.

One could certainly argue that there is a progressive lineage within modern music, that is far wider than the progressive rock tradition hitherto identified, and values complexity, virtuosity and musical innovation over the values dear to rock and roll and punk (accessibility, immediacy and so on). However, it might be more fertile to think in terms of a shared conceptual tradition, connecting darkwave, goth and related strains of music, which is the post-Romantic tradition of the "gothic". This seeks to go beyond the immediate realities of everyday life, in order to address the workings of a universe that is seen as both non-moral and sublime - a terrain in which God is dead but the lure of the sacred persists. This view of the world can inspire a wide range of musical responses, but the sensibility connects them.

Perhaps, in the end, there is such a thing as **shadow music** - a music that resides in the deeper spaces and interstices of life, resisting reassurance and superficial closure, but undespairs of transcendence. This music tends to be "progressive" in character, because it tries to deal with a complex and subtle reality rather than a world of commonplace mammalian urges - however, it can take a myriad forms, and has done so ever since the days of Mozart's *Requiem* (and even before). If such a music can be said to exist, as a meaningful category, then I would argue that some of its most successful current practitioners are Italian - escaping from a world of mall culture, Rai Uno and go-get-it capitalism to a richer realm, a realm in which the shadows continue to fall.

This is a well-reasoned article from Norman, yet the responses I have received from Italian band Nova suggest that Italy has its own cultural problems: nowhere can be said to be perfect! Read the interview with Nova to get an even more overall view of how things stand, in Italy as much as in the UK. Ed.

Goth Slut

.....but first he had to get down and stroke my boots, take them in his hands show appropriate reverence kick him once or twice show him who's boss it had to be done then he had to lick them and lick them all over as I smoked into his face, on your knees you pathetic scum try harder then I just had to tie him up spread-eagled on the bed let's see what you are made of under those skin-tight PVC leggings hmm not bad not bad just a few more corrective measures have to show him who's boss tighten those manacles oh my, does it hurt now, does it hurt, ah-ha now we are beginning to see a fair-to-middling result I may just let him nice and hard after all thrust it in my soft flesh all the way now all the way what's his name again not bad not bad maybe not as good as WillSteveJezSiLexyAndyChris DavePortSteve Talk about goth slut though Steve does it with everyone anyone anywhere boy girl no ties anyone

Just anyone not so sure gotta be cool any cool guys..... no ties well not those kind of ties no involvement

PVC so tight on this one so tight and nice and big tonight for me so big in my turgid flesh touching me all over wanted it so much so much but got to show who's boss like and animal now what's his name again

just show him who's boss no involvement with the love comes the hate with the love comes the hate betray him betray me mine forever no such thing as permanence better to be cool better to be free spiders and praying mantises have the best idea eat your husbands snack on another then another alas no fangs yet just have to make do with being a goth slut now what's his name again.....imagine doing it with him can't remember his name but so cool on stage so distant cold blond distant bet he'd be so good still have to show him who's boss bet he'd be so good so cool imagine what he'd be like imagine imagine



Interview with Nova

After having listened to Nova's excellent most recent release, Utopica Musa, I was delighted to be able to have the opportunity to put my questions to them in this interview.



How did you form? Is it true that you are brother and sister?

We are not brother and sister, but boyfriend and girlfriend. We formed Nova in 1997. In 1999 we produced our first demo, called "Voli Sferici", which got a good reception among the Italian dark scene. We have played for many goth organisations, and taken part in some gothic compilations, such as "Intimations of Immortality 5", "Rosa Selvaggia 1", "Perversion:". In 2001 Cold Meat Industry produced our cd "Utopica Musa".

What is the area like where you live? Are there many gothic types around there?

We live in a beautiful town of the Lake of Garda, in the north of Italy. But, for its beauty, this place has become a tourist destination for the masses, especially for sporting activities... so there is not much space for culture, and gothic subculture least of all!

Do you have any classical musical training at all or classical training in singing? Who influences you most, classically speaking?

We are self-taught persons, and we prefer a more personal and contemporary research than a classical one.

Are you influenced at all by Middle Eastern folk music at all?

We are curious and eclectic, so we never thought to our music as a "middle eastern influenced" one. But sometimes we play unusual scales to find new forms of expression, and this could sound "exotic".

Which bands, gothic or otherwise, do you admire most from Italy at the moment?

At the moment we are organizing some gigs in our town for bands like Ataraxia, Ludmila, Lily's Puff, Damma and others. We hope they can play inside castles or old churches. We admire honest and humble people (gothic or otherwise).

Until I heard the *Energeia* album, I had no idea that so many excellent bands existed in Italy. How would you describe the scene in Italy currently, to someone who is an outsider, and how important would you say is the medieval heritage or Catholicism to the general gothic sound in Italy?

Unlikely, here in Italy, many "dark" bands and people are seduced for extreme right points of view. Well, we do not admire them, and we said that. But, we pay reckoning for our consistency. Now gothic clubs never call us, and many gothic people consider us disagreeable, tiresome, or prefer to ignore us. Why? Because we said we are libertarian! That's all. (Just for being 'libertarian?' This certainly does not sound too good. There is enough intolerance from the public at large towards all things gothic, but prejudices coming from within...readers are free to write in with their views on this issue. ed.))

What has been the response both at home and abroad to your album? What are your plans for the future?

"Utopica Musa" had had good responses. Then we had those "political problems", and from then there is a strange "silence" around our project. Maybe this is only a coincidence, or perhaps one must keep off certain subjects... Who knows? Anyway, let's see how things will turn out!



What are you most trying to express through your music, emotionally speaking?

We try to express what we are, what we think and what we feel sincerely.

"Utopica Musa" talks about the conflict between ideals and reality, freedom and hypocrisy, doubt and choice, possibilities and hopes.

Any plans to gig abroad in the near future? Which countries would you most like to visit if you could?

We would like to play abroad, even if we doubt that a shy but "anarchist" duo singing in Italian, could interest anyone! Beyond gigs, we would like to travel as when in the 19th century people settled in foreign countries for long periods of time, assimilating the culture and way of life. But alas, this project lies in the book of waking dreams!

Anyone who may be interested in helping a certain libertarian band find venues anywhere in Europe can contact Nova at mailtonova@libero.it

Poems, by AE Evans



ONLY SHADOWS

Perfection's bitter fires
Burn my renegade soul,
A remnant hovering
Between lost shadows.
I can see an open door,
A welcome darkness
Disclosing your presence,
A fractured, golden sphere.
This sad fissure signals
How our ruined world
Is so flawed, and how
I experience so acutely
The pain of separation
Or worse, the anguish
Of not knowing you.
Overhead a failing star.

Below, there are only
Shadows.

LOST WORDS

Lost?
Our thoughts only
Slowly fade into
This closed sphere
For now here where
Our
Residual enchanted
World is the last
Of all those
Resplendent
Dying
Suns

Poison Quill Reviews

Womb: Spiteful Extractions
C/O Greg Ferrari
11 Pine Crescent
Hutton
Brentwood
Essex CN13 1JE



Spiteful Extractions is the second album from Greg Ferrari, and consists of 10 tracks fairly bristling for the most part with post-punk attitude, kicking in straight away with spiky aggression on the opening track, 'She's a boy.' One Real Kiss,' which follows it, however, has more swooping, evocative melody too it, with a melancholic, thoroughly gothy hook on the bass line.

Actually, a lot of the middle tracks reminded me a lot of The Wake, a probably now-defunct band from the States who adopted most of what was most oppressive in the Sisters, though with a more Killing Joke edge.

My favourite track was the anthemic 'Apology.' Maybe this is because it is rather more unashamedly, traditionally early-eighties goth, which is clearly where Womb takes root primarily. Dirty guitars, partnered by Cure-ish strumming. The closing track, 'Others,'

on the hand, closes the album on a rather wistful note.

I cannot say that the ideas are new here, though in rejecting the formulaic approach adopted by many brit would-be goth bands, Womb manages to convey a freshness of attitude which seems to be absent from within other, comparable outfits.

Nova
Via Brione 10-38066
Riva Del Garda TN
ITALY



What a treat it was to get the debut full-length from this duo from Italy into my hands. This, unlike the EP, is lavishly presented, and beautifully mixed, and exudes rarefied quality and top-notch craftsmanship all the way through.

The music itself, broadly speaking, is firmly situated within the DCD or Love is Colder than Death school of goth, and the choral purity of the vocals of Chiara Ferrari, gives Utopica Musa its hymn-like, almost sacred, quality.

There is a glacial quality to some of the tracks, which you might expect with tracks titled 'Clouds' or 'Distance' for

example. Yet the mood can also change from this one of coldness – so reminiscent of so much from the electro-industrial genres – to one of great warmth, melody and depth of emotion, as though evoking a sense of deep nostalgia and longing on the eight track especially, which, if I have it rightly, is titled 'The seven lives of the Cat.'

This comes very strongly recommended. Read the article on the Italian goth scene by Norman Jope in this edition for more in-depth comments on this album!

Lacrimosa – Fassade
Hall of Sermion
www.nuclearblast.de

This sounds as though this could be a powerful new album, and it is good to see Lacrimosa back on track; their last album, Elodia, whilst sublime in places, was somewhat uneven. Unfortunately, I am unable to write a review that will do this album justice, because the promo I was sent was incomplete. Each track was lopped off towards the end, making it impossible to tell a) how each track resolves itself and b) how each track blends into the composition as a whole. It is like having received a book of poems, only with the last 10 lines of each poem, deleted.

It is a pity that more faith was not exhibited, as it is impossible for me to form a clear impression of this particular release. I would be happy to review this album – and any others like this one – at a future date if I am given the full material.

Erben der Schopfung
Focusion Records
iris@focusion.de



This new Austrian band is inspired by Trakl, who, as a dark, melancholy poet at the beginning of the last century obsessed with love and death and dying tragically young, is a good example of the gothic sensibility at work. (Now, *what* was that again about gothic being a timeless aesthetic, rather than just a fashion?)

There is nothing particularly original about the format, it has to be said, though it works more than adequately: angelic female vocals set against operatic metal. Think Nightfall, Theatre of Tragedy, dreams of Sanity, and you will know full well what to expect.

It is not as overwrought as other examples of this type of band in action, and is genuinely atmospheric as well as possessing the required ballsy metal edge.

Overall pleasing, slightly better than average in quality, and certainly recommended to all who particularly like those gothic metal bands which are a showcase for female vocals.

De-Vision: two
Focusion Records
Iris@focusion.de



Electronic music is certainly making a comeback! Fast forward – or rather backwards – to Berlin now, with 10 tracks of post Depeche Mode Eighties Electronicity. All very tastefully presented in a white CD sleeve with the obligatory with the obligatory, shiny piece of machinery: futuristic in image, just like Kraftwerk and Gary Numan before them, of course.

Musically, however, it was difficult to avoid a general impression of blandness. The male vocals are pleasant, the background chorussing discrete, nice little post 90's tracks update the sound somewhat, which already tried to sound futuristic, but the point is...this looks backwards, not forwards, though I am sure there are plenty of danceable tracks to delight many an electro-head: Silent Moan amongst others, for example. Also, whilst to some extent, a certain low-keyness is actually part of this style of music, something still seemed to be missing overall: perhaps, more of the experimental edge of old, when this style of music was still truly fresh.

Welten Brand: In Gottesdes Teufels Namen
Focusion Records
Iris@focusion.de

Oh, dear, oh dear. I am sure that this album is worthy in all intentions, and it is certainly well-packaged, but this really does not work for me. The male/female duet vocals are fine, it is professionally mixed with more-than-competent musicianship, but it really, really plods. This sounds incredibly overdone, seeming to combine all the worst elements of, say, Lacrimosa, at their most overwrought, but delivered in a totally leaden monotone, which varies very little throughout the whole album. For the fans this one, I think.

The Last Dance
Appolyon Records
 Altenbauner Str. 27 34134
 Kassel
 Germany
<http://www.apollyon.de>



So then, would you like to sound like Duran Duran?

Actually, what first came to mind was London After Midnight, on first listening to this album a couple of times. Yet there is nothing of the sleaziness present in London After Midnight – whilst this is keyboard dominated and the vocalist initially reminded me of them too, what

ultimately came to mind was something far more flowing and mellow: Duran Duran, with just a little more of a hint of nastiness – the growled vocals 'this is not my trip' present on the third track, and re-emerging at the end. (this is all very much all of a piece too). It is all laced with electro touches here and there, giving it that indifferent edge; this is the stuff you bring in later at night, when the fever of up-tempo dance is starting to slake off and things are beginning to mellow out. Tracks 6 and 12 struck me as being especially strongly-crafted, like Duran at their best in style, circa their 'Rio' period; the tenth track also seemed to be a good slow one for crooning couples on the dance floor. Unfortunately, it is followed by an rather irritatingly up-tempo track, which is a little too the vein of post-eighties Depeche Mode wannabes. (It is not clear which track belongs to which, as they do not seem to be in chronological order on the sleeve. Naughty...)

Overall, however, this is a very pleasing new release, and is certainly less bland than other bands I have heard of this ilk. This in part can be attributed to the better-than average vocals of frontman, Jeff Diehm. 'Perfect' may not precisely be perfect, but it could certainly complement your electro-goth collection of albums very nicely.

No Pain at Midsummer Night
<http://www.extra.hu/nopain>
 email: nopain@freemail.hu



My first acquaintance with this new Hungarian band was live, at a day festival in Budapest organised by the ever-energetic Tajték Nap crew.

What we have here is potentially a fascinating fusion of sounds and styles. It certainly opens dramatically, with siren vocals from sisters Ladybird and Bagoth. What follows, however, is a little uneven; in fact the very best track is a home-recorded bonus at the very end of the album, which is a fascinating fusion of dark folk and classical influences along the lines of Engelsstaub and Current 93. It extends for almost 15 minutes without losing its charisma. However, No Pain also have aspirations in the rock-grunge direction and this is where they fall down. The best exercise in this genre, Circus of Death, has a marvellously compelling hook, but is marred by over-enthusiastic percussion and an inability to maintain its direction.

Overall this is an ambitious project, and the potential this band exhibits is huge. However, this particular CD is marred in places by some somewhat amateurish mixing and problems in synthesising the timing of the percussion. For this reason, I wish they had perfected their sound a

little more, before committing this material to disc; however, I also wish that they get the chance to release further material as they obviously have the musical ability and imagination to produce original music of a very high standard.

Arnak: Nehéz Csend
Hammer Music Productions
 Email: hammer@westel900.net



This full-length CD begins very promisingly with a haunting bass instrumental (though the vocals chime in later), and reminds me of Nosferatu at their more inspired. It soon kicks into a full-frontal metally attack, however, delivered with aggression and gusto.

Nehéz Csend – which means ‘difficult (or awkward, or painful) silence’ by the way – cannot simply be summarised as a metal band; metal, in the form of tough-sounding riffs and abrupt stops and starts, is part of the furniture, but so is the presence of the dark-wave ballad. This works best within tracks such as ‘Gyász’ – ie ‘mourning.’ Hypnotically slowed pace, grandly melancholy. Maybe this is the direction Arnak would be most advised to develop in the future; it is tracks like these where they sound most polished, and confident. And shed some of those metal pretensions.

The lyrics, in Hungarian, are rather introspective in places: all about dealing with the Shadow both within and without: track 2, translated, means ‘Who is protecting you from yourself?’

In places, Arynak seem to overreach themselves; they sometimes tackle chords and riffs, which are executed relatively clumsily due to a relative lack of practise and technique. Once again, I find myself wishing that they had had the opportunity to literally burnish these imperfections out of the album before unveiling Nehéz Csend into the ruthless light of day. The good news of course, is that they can only get better.

And I certainly hope they will.

Madrigal: I die, you soar
Nuclear Blast
Jaap@nuclearblast.de



Madrigal is one more gothic metal band – that is to say, a goth-tinged heavy metal band.

It has a sweeping, dramatic sound, this being effected through the extensive use of piano solos on tracks such as ‘Languish;’ here for me, these work well. This gives it the gothic tinge, in so far this, and the use of melodic guitars in places, adds mystery and mood to the album, so that it is not just swathes of

noise and riffs for their own sake. Riffs on tracks such as ‘Mind in Disguise’ there are here, however, set against laboured screaming vocals; not a style in itself, which does a great deal for me, to be honest; the guy sounds at these points, as though he is struggling valiantly against constipation. There is more to Madrigal, where they manage to bring back those more melodic touches for that fuller sound, on tracks such as ‘In Debris’ and on ‘Sunken Eyes’ and I hope it is this they will develop on future releases. They can be capable of building up a reasonable amount of tension throughout on most tracks and as the album draws to a close, there are nice contrasts between gentle, more reflective moments, and then the full-frontal approach. When they don’t drag it out too much.

I have heard worse within this genre, and you know better than idea if this is likely to be for you.

At least nothing was lopped off on the album, which made it a lot easier to assess from that point of view.

Dawn of Oblivion – Mephisto’s
Appealing
M&A MusicArt
m-a.musicart@usa.net



And what Can I say to this? Would you like to sound like Nosferatu?

Well maybe not precisely, and I was glad to see – or rather hear – that Dawn of Oblivion are now sounding less formulaised than they did, even if this is now towards a direction I personally do not much like i.e., a more metally one. That is most noticeable on tracks such as ‘Repulsion,’ which is rather more challenging rhythm-wise, and less stolidly chugging. ‘Brain Dead’ on the other hand is majestically slower, and the breathy intensity of the vocals brings earlier Lacrimosa more to mind; not a bad track, this. The seventh track, G.O.D. stood out a little more for me, as whilst it did not neglect all those metally riffs, it had a somewhat folky, mellow atmosphere too.

The lyrics are politically very correct, with titles such as ‘Nuclear Winter,’ ‘Hellfire Sermon’ makes it point regarding the human tendency towards general self-destruction, too.

All in all a worthy album, even though not exactly original in conception or style.

Evereve – e-mania
Focusion Records

This is an album of some 12 tracks of Industrial-tinged heavy metal, as if the sleeve design, depicting leather S&M, didn’t leave us in any doubt about where this is coming from. Neither are we given room to doubt, with titles such as ‘The Flesh Divine.’ Fetishists and Torture Garden enthusiasts might just appreciate this, at least for the visual effects and lyrics.

I was afraid it would all just be leaden, bone-crushing noise after hearing the first track but in fact, the album is capable of more melodious, gentle moments, achieved through the use of high-octave gothy guitars, on tracks such as 'Pilgrimage' for example; unfortunately, this is rare.

It would be a mistake to assume that Evereve are another, say, NIN. They most certainly are not; this is still very firmly on the metal side of the fence, with headstrong tracks and energetic riffs and percussion. Not bad as it goes, though I cannot truthfully say it did a great deal for me. It might for you if you like this kind of style, as it is certainly put together competently enough, has moderately hard attitude and there may well be enough subtle touches to keep most metalheads happy.

EP'S

Ashram
For my Sun Panarello Sergio
Email: ashram@freemail.it Via
Galeota, 581025 Naples
ITALY



Seven tracks there are in all on this EP, and once more from the Energeia stable do Ashram come.

Once again, this is rarefied music, almost minimalist, accompanied as it is by just piano, cello and violin, somewhat neo-classical from an instrumental point of view. The mood is achingly sad and romantic, with flowing and gentle piano overspilling on most tracks here. The lyrics, incidentally, are in English. The vocals remind me a little of Garfunkel, though do not let this put you off; it is a vocal style which complements the music perfectly, though without any of the slushiness of the latter: this is on another plane altogether.

Let us hope Ashram get snapped up too by a good label – the talent shines through with understated simplicity throughout the EP.

Silbernacht: Gabrielstal
C/O Frank Esser
Kempener Allee
47803 Krefeld
Germany



More film-score type music from the lugubrious Frank Esser with this 14-minute track of melancholic neo-classical music, somewhat in the style of early Lacrimosa though more muted, and without the bombastic edge of the latter. The presentation is a little low-budget, though that is doubtless something that can be improved in time, luck and a

greater body of work to present. Get in touch with Frank and ask after his material if you enjoy chilling out in the small hours of the morning to the kind of sombre material which evokes dusty rooms, crypts, and so on.

Spares: End of The Line
Musicart
Foringggatan
S-211 44 Malmö
Sweden
m-musicart@usa.net



This EP includes two tracks from their previous album, 'Tired and Bizarre,' though with a taster of things to come. This is in the form of an alternative mix to the second track 'The Snail's Rave,' and a snail's pace it adopts in this version, it is not. It is powerfully rhythmic and dancy: real disco hit material, much like New Order for the post 90's. This, more than anything else here, makes me look forward to their coming new album.

Download

.....and Spares treat us with a foretaste yet again with things to come from their forthcoming new album, Download: Intermemory, Hourglass and Serpentine. The last track is a remix of Snail's Rave from their previous debut, reviewed in an earlier issue of SS: Tired and Bizarre. Intermemory is relatively lightweight, but serves as a good introduction to the

EP – or a whole album; guest female vocals are featured on the next tracks, Hourglass and Serpentine. There is a 60's-ish feel about both these two tracks, and the latter sounds quite psychedelic. A little like was most memorable of the Mission, circa Masque at the best moments.

Clearly the Spares are continuing in their more eclectic direction, so it will be interesting to see how things continue to develop from here.

CASSETTES
Venus Fly Trap
PO Box 210
Northampton NN2 6AU UK

Venus Fly Trap must surely be one of those trouser bands that just keeps going. I have heard of them many times, but only recently managed to actually hear their tape.

What I got was a 'best-of' compilation of 16 tracks in all, of traditional, scratchy goth of driving rhythms, infectious beats, and cast very firmly in the Alien Sex Fiend mould.

The tracks sound a little Fiendish too, with titles such as 'Rocket USA' 'Pulp Sister' and 'I am a camera.' Pulp Sister I was one of the stronger tracks on this collection; overall though, the sound has a driven, obsessive feel to it, making it perhaps regrettable that VFT have not received more recognition than they have to date.

COMPILATIONS
Bizarre 13
www.sprilarchive.com

'Bizarre' is a taped compilation of goth/darkwave tracks from bands within the goth/darkwave umbrella. There are 19 tracks in all, and the tape comes with a small A5 zine, too. It is part of the same concern which spawned Venus Fly Trap, the UK-based goth band, whose cassette taped I have also reviewed above.

The bands are not all UK-based - the album boasts for example, and offering from France's Die Form, Olanar Modulator from Portugal, Electro Glow from Canada; Australia's Punctured Vein and Electro-glow from Canada. From the UK, Chaos Engine, Lady Morphia and Complicity, amongst others, are featured. There is in fact, quite a medley of sounds, ranging from industrial, such as Fur Immer, to Medieval, in the case of Glory Be. The last-mentioned, from the UK, are totally obscure, as may well be some of the other names mentioned here; on the other hand, bands such as Die Form are more well-known.

This is a very worthy mix, the problem being, of course, that this has not been produced on a CD and with a glossy, professionally-printed zine to match, and commercialism now rules supreme. If readers here can get past this kind of snobbery though, you should find on this tape, as good and varied an introduction to the contemporary goth scene as any.

Rosa Selvaggia: Atto II
www.naiadi.com



This is the compilation CD accompanying the Italian-based zine, Selvaggia Rosa. All the songs featured, are from Italian bands and features two tracks from Vidi Aquam, who were also featured on Immortality 5, and Ashram, whose EP is also reviewed in this edition.

A lot of the bands featured here seem to be newer, and a lot more obscure. The overall quality of music was therefore perhaps a little more uneven than it had been on the first CD with these relatively untried and unknowns. Individual tracks which stood out for me, and otherwise unknown to me, included 'Pilgrim' from Hangmans's Joke; ballsy, Bluesy female vocals; altogether a more sinister Gitane Demone; the gently Cure-ish strumming on the following track 'CafeViennese' from Kyrie, also appealed to me. Militia Christi are clearly using early Lacrimosa as a starting point, whereas 'Par trop timp?' from Cinise was an experiment in soundscapes; Vid Aquam also show their experimental side in their last track, not on their recent 8-track release, titled 'Apocalisse.'

It is worth ordering the zine for the compilation alone, if you cannot read this because of the language. There are intriguing new discoveries to be made,

and I am certainly looking forward to getting to getting the next one.

Angel Child - The Need for Silence
info@ma_musicart.com



Andreas and those stalwarts in promoting what's new in goth have been busy again: hence this new compilation. There are 15 tracks in all, and it was good to note that Star Industry (whom I interviewed for the second edition of this zine) are busy again, as are the UK's Spares, along with Funhouse and Womb too.

Funhouse were their usual smooth selves, and I detect little change in their Missionish sound; they are not the only Mission clones, as they are preceded by the glutinous 'Brave New World' from one Elusive Cure. We had more Nosferatu-style metal goth from Mist of Avalon and Dawn of Oblivion: these offerings remain faithful to the old formulas. 'One Real Kiss' from Womb breaks things up next, with a their raw, post-punk trademark. Next, Star Industry, Star Industry, with 'Faith;' comes in the style of The Merry Thoughts, infectiously catchy, though. It is followed by 'Hollow' from The Drowning Season, though this is contrast is sedate rather than energetic. Rocky-horror hi-jinks come next, with Kindred Spirit's 'Freakshow.' It is followed by

yet another remix of Spare's 'Serpentine;' it was a little constipated this version for my liking however. Emma Conquest take the stage next with 'Strap on Massacre;' unaccountably, this reminded me of a more raucous Bucks Fizz. It is followed by 'Temple of Secrets' from - guess what - Corrosion; at least the vocalist does not try to growl his way through this one though; Burning Gates, however, does come with obligatory canyon vocals and the usual chords. Not bad - none of this is as bad as all that - but does it have to be so predictable?

The next two tracks feature female vocalists in the main: firstly, Centuria with 'Heaven and....' - a romantic sort of a ballad with metal underpinnings: think Nightwish, only more gentle. The Last Dance are next with neo-Durani mellowness; finally The 69 Eyes completes things with another slowish, Glutinous Missiony number.

All the tracks are carefully chosen on this album to complement each other and as such, this presents a good showcase of what is available within traditional goth. With an accent on the *traditional*: this is not exactly groundbreaking stuff; it sounds more like a tribute, not describing what is hopefully a changing and an evolving genre. Something a little more experimental here and there, would therefore have been welcome. Keep it up, Angel Child. Only don't be afraid to challenge us a little more too, in the future.



The Picture

by Pandora



The first time Oliver Winters ever saw the picture it had in fact, hardly registered with him. It had been during a less than satisfactory course in Spanish, in which he had been trying to polish up his less-than-satisfactory intermediate grasp of the tongue, during an early-evening course with the obligatory imported native speaker, Maria Gonzalez. He had been planning on a short trip to Seville in the near future, and he had not wanted to be like the typical, arrogant Englishman abroad, expecting all the locals to kow-tow to him in his own language. And anyway, his company had made it clear that they had expected him to be able to demonstrate sensitivity to local culture.

Maria, he supposed, had not actually been a truly bad teacher. She had clearly planned her lessons in a rough-and-ready sort of a way – and after all, the object of her lessons had always been that he himself and all his other tongue-tied classmates, actually *speak*, rather than painstakingly master more verb-endings and the like. Yet somehow the woman's ways had grated on him, unreasonably so. She had not been young – thirty-something maybe or even older – not attractive to any of the male students at all, as far as he could judge. Not so much of the charming Latin Señoritas here, sorry to say. She had had a pinched, sallow face with a protruding mouth, thin arms, flabby torso and a high-pitched, rapid gun-fire squawk which had often gone right over the heads of the slower members of the class. Her teeth were yellow from smoking, and her breath had not always been sweet. And the inevitable over-tight tweed skirts and the high-heeled shoes that had always caused her to mince. Also, the way she had tried to encourage the class, draw them out, had often, albeit probably unintentionally, seemed condescending to him. Treating them all like five-year-olds. Perhaps she had had an exaggerated sense of her own dynamic charisma as an entertaining linguistic facilitator. At any rate, her in-your-face style with them had frequently brought him out on the verge of unforgivable rudeness with her.

In one such class, she had been showing the group a series of pictures and drawings. 'What is this person wearing,' she would ask in that tiring Spanish. 'What does she look like, what kind of a person would you say she is?'

'Erm, erm, erm.' Why do English people all sound so inane when they try to speak another language, he had been wondering.

An uncomfortable feeling at his back. *Uh-oh*, he thought. The damn woman has come to me. Seeking yet another offering of half-baked elicitation. Her dank, breathy presence leaning over his shoulder, gesturing at a stark monochrome of a tempestuous-looking woman in profile. He could just recognise what Maria was asking from him. *Get it over with*, he tried to tell himself, once more feeling that irrational inhibition of sounding stupid, just because he was using a different language. *Then maybe she'll go pester another student*. Concentrate, now.

It was an artist's drawing, neo-Beardsley-esque in style, almost a silhouette: a tall, thin woman with a hooked nose in profile, cheroot in hand, staring out at a distant view from a promenade. How do you say 'hooked' in Spanish, he wondered.

Obviously he did not. But he was certainly able to say that she was very ugly, once the redoubtable Maria pressed him for still more, and then he was able to lean back in his chair. There was a slightly muffled snicker from Jenny, a divorced single mother who was also on the course. Why couldn't she know any better, he wondered to himself. Behaving like a child in class again.

But Maria was not quite finished with him yet. 'Would you like to meet with a lady like this?' she had asked him with quirked eyebrows. Trying to be amusing and witty again.

Even then, in retrospect, the 'no' had come out even more vehemently than he had intended, or maybe it had been the presence of Maria which had irritated him, that or general atmosphere within the classroom. Certainly, the picture had not depicted a pleasant portrait – the profile had displayed genuinely unattractive features and in addition, the expression showed on the face had seemed to be both pathetic and sneering.....

The business trip to Spain came and went, and he had managed to negotiate what had been needed without too many hiccups. He chiefly retained memories of sunlight, dark evenings spent in bars and of constant, exotic-sounding names and banter. His boss had appeared to be pleased with him when he arrived back, yet at the same time, felt that there was also the very faintest undercurrent of disapproval about the impression he had made out there. He put that down, however, to his being insecure in a new job environment.

The first time he had felt conscious that a problem had started to haunt him was during an unfortunate incident at a lunch break. There had been a busy crossing, and two women in front of him were talking at nineteen-to-a-dozen, partly blocking his view of the road. He probably would not have registered their presence at all, apart from the fact that one of them had been talking animatedly with a Spanish accent. He remembered that she had in fact been quite tall and angular, and not especially young.

He had been conscious that time was running out and had not wanted to meet disapproval at work by coming in late, and anyway he had given in to a momentary weakness by having more than one glass of wine with his meal. These were the kind of things that might easily give a bad impression of his performance at this delicate stage of his career. So, he had stepped quickly into the road once the pelican had showed green, vaguely remembered a shouted 'look out!' then the squeal of breaks. Heart in his mouth, he had frozen – but the crisis was over, breaks had been applied, and all he heard now, was a growl of muffled curses from behind the wheel of the over-impulsive driver. But still very shaken, he had turned, only to see the Spanish lady. Briefly, their eyes had locked, a wave of dizziness and muzziness then overcame him, and then it seemed.....

that a veil had momentarily occluded his real vision, and just briefly, somehow, superimposed on his everyday reality....of course, the Spanish lady had been amused, and that was all he had perceived, rather than anything else. Yet to his overwrought senses at that precise moment, what he thought he had seen, what it had looked like to him...for a brief moment, the features of the Spanish lady had coalesced into a mask of almost demonic contempt. The eyes had flashed with unholy glee, the full lips obscenely gloating, the hooked nose high in disdain, the sheer and utter disgust at it all: the picture, that awful picture, somehow reflected back at him in all its warped and distorted loathing.

Oliver Winters faltered in mid-stride, then stopped: his briefcase had fallen, now he must pick it up, try to pull himself together and, sobered, he made his way back to his office space at work where, fortunately, neither his colleagues or his boss, were able to perceive anything whatsoever the matter with him...



That should have been the end of it, but it was not. For that very night, Oliver woke up after disturbing dreams in which an ageing, bony hag had somehow managed to forcibly slobber her foul wet mouth over his protesting face and lips, his body shaking with revulsion. He had reached out to turn on the light, hoping to recognise the mundane normality of his rented room, and there indeed it all stood before him, until his eyes took in the knotted wood of the wardrobe in the far corner.

But it could not be... a hypnogogic image maybe, a small voice inside himself tried to rationalise. He had read about those once, he remembered. One of his friends telling him about what happened after she had woken up suddenly, after having watched a horror film. Oliver rubbed his eyes, and tried again, looked at the wardrobe, tried to stare at it objectively, through and around it. But as the waking state took hold more, so did the

fascinated revulsion of his obsession with what the whorls and lines within the wood now mercilessly taunted him: the lines and whorls of that loathsome, hated face, and that contemptuous expression. And night after night it came to be the norm, whether or not he was alone in his bedroom, on public transport, even in the office.



Such a state of mind had its way of leaking out, being noticeable to others, as time went on. First the solicitous questioning of his landlady over the increasing loss of appetite, the pallor, which he had tried to pass off as insomnia or overwork. Colleagues becoming aware of an increasing distractedness. And finally, inevitably his immediate boss, in fact, so it was hinted, even bosses who were higher-up than that, had been starting to notice. His evaluation assessment interviews now started to include warnings about the need to stay on the ball in this kind of challenging, pro-active environment, just how important it was to show that he was the absolute team-player, totally adjusted of course, at all times. The riot act had been read out to him. Oliver now knew that he had to do something about it, and fast....

He had not especially taken to Dr Wilson at first, finding him obnoxiously solicitous and unctuous. And that stupid, affected bow tie under that porcine double chin. The way he had always *watched* him, stared at him, as he had sat there in his office, as though every single mannerism was capable of giving away some kind of deep dark inner kink, festering neurosis or psychosis, like opening up an innocent organ with a well-honed

knife, only to find it festering with a whole canker of worms... Was his inner soul really that corrupt, he wondered.

Shame had therefore made him economical with the truth, and he had expounded a lot on how it was merely the pressures of work that had got to him, and not pictures, nor malignant images on his inner eye, trying to destroy him, no, nothing like that at all. Not until desperation finally caused him to attempt something a lot worse did the story finally come out, so that Dr Wilson was finally enlightened, the paternal hand on his shoulder, soothing him, finally....

'It's an organic condition,' he was told. He was not actually crazy at all he seemed, having unwelcome thoughts like these was actually far, far more common than most people ever recognised, because its sufferers, just like himself, tended to be so secretive about it. Just a little glitch in the workings of the brain, just like a computer could sometimes 'catch' a virus.

More to the point, it was eminently curable. Just take this medicine regularly, he was told, and he would soon find his life getting back to his old perspective. No need even to take any time off work, which might have looked bad on his employment record in the future. You just need to consent to taking the treatment straight away, and no-one need be any the wiser.



So Oliver Winters undertook the obligatory tests and scans on a couple of discrete afternoons and did everything that Dr Wilson had instructed him to do. And surely enough, he did start to get better. To begin with, he was not able to completely banish the disturbing images of the picture from his mind or his imagination straight away, but now that he knew there was a name for the problem, he was no longer quite so distressed by it. Then as the weeks went by, the images began to recede more and more and, as the year began to mellow more fully into a late Spring, he began to experience a growing sense of well-being and optimism about himself and his future. As the year then moved from Summer into Autumn, he had finally, almost managed to forget about it, to the point that he had almost become flippant about it. So when he heard that an exhibition was going to be shown in his area, from a similar artist to the one who had penned the image the

dreaded Gonzales woman had once shown him, he decided to visit the opening show. Let everyone see how far he had come since the beginning of the year.

It was already dark by the time he found the venue, along a hidden street in one of the less well-known arts of the city. The gallery looked a little run-down on the outside, but it seemed moderately sophisticated inside.

The drawings – some of which were etchings – depicted much the same thing, and Winters learnt that they were actually meant to represent the negative, or shadow-aspect of the Feminine. Honouring the Kali or the Witch Within, and other such nonsense. All a little bit esoteric for him, though he had to admit that the artist indeed possessed a certain charm in her somewhat quaint drawing style. He was not actually tempted to speak with her, but instead, observed her from afar. The pictures could easily have been at least in part, some kind of a self-image, he decided. She was certainly no great beauty, apart from those long locks of raven, plaited hair; age had hardened her thin features, making her somewhat stern in countenance. Still, he would support her meagre earnings in whichever way he could.....he purchased a small card of hers, turned up his collar, then moved out back into the darkness, on his way home, whistling his way along the mean streets, though no-one tried to accost him. He arrived home in good time, prepared for bed as usual, and slid beneath the covers, ready for sleep and then the next day at work.

He woke up for no reason at about 2 in the morning, with vague feeling of uneasiness, stretched, then rubbed his eyes. With no feeling of panic, he looked at the wardrobe; nothing untoward there all this was, after all, in the *past* now.

It was only when he turned out the light, than he suddenly became aware of a physical presence beside him, in his bed. Heavy, like a grey stone. Still unalarmed, he squinted more closely in the darkness. At first, he was not able to make out the presence in its entirety, but a certain musky stench, did. And a sudden wheeze of overripe breath. His body became stiffened, paralysed as a supposedly-vanquished dread squeezed his very vitals yet again. *Surely, this could not be.*

Then, a strong hand pulled his towards a pair of pendulous breasts, and muscular, scaly legs wrapped themselves round his pelvis. He could just make out the mottle of the greyish maw of what was her hungry pubic mound and a drowned cry from within his gorge, stifled before it even began, wailed: 'Unclean!' His accustomed eyes were now only too able to make out the triumphant glint of those unrepentant, adamantine eyes staring into his own, braids of wild, coarse hair tickling into his eyes, then that gloating, full mouth finally fastening and enveloping itself on his, and despite himself he was helpless to do anything else but respond to the vileness that had finally, totally trapped him.

DARKNESS OR NOTHING by AC Evans



I was alone and the silent street
empty;
So, imperceptibly, the faint gleam
between
Darkness or nothing mirrored my
solitude.
Yet this isolation is haunted -
By an echo of your perpetual
absence; or
The very trauma of knowing how
separation
Blights this benighted city of
shadows.
Will you never explain how,
yesterday,
As the street-scene changed,
mournful cries
Of desperation conjured those
lowering
Storm-clouds, sky-high above
bustling,
Apathetic crowds avoiding the
downpour,
Preventing me from touching you, I
say
Reaching you: there, where a dead
bird lay
By an open drain, a symbol of
consciousness,

Like the cracked-open surface of
Time,
Calcified by pain; mute, numb and
lost.
This is where logic cannot follow,
where
Humiliating declarations of frustrated
desire
Follow twisted, jaded feelings,
interposed
Again, I say, 'again', between us.
I mean 'You' and 'I',
In this insane incarnation, where
Nothing, not even the dark, can ever
Restore the true nature of your
perfection.
Your presence persists in this
impossible,
Enclosed space, where a fleeting
thought
Amid the transience of awareness is
my only
Memory trace...of you.

—
A C Evans
23 Grosvenor Avenue
East Sheen
London
SW14 8BT
England
UK

a c evans can also be found at
www.the-void.ws
(online gallery)

Adverts and Miscellaneous

I am not even going to pretend to put these in any particular order, this is what is either on my 'delete items' on my email server, information I have been given by friends/acquaintances, or gleaned from other sources. If you would like to advertise anything here, then get in touch via the address shown at the beginning of the zine.

NOVITA' NEL SITO DELLA 99 POSSE E' finalmente attivo il

negozio on-line dove potrai trovare i dischi ed il merchandise dei 99 Posse, dei Narcolexia e degli altri gruppi dell'etichetta a prezzi scontati e ricevendo tutto comodamente a casa, l'indirizzo a cui collegarti è:
<http://www.ecomm.novenove.it>
 Abbiamo inoltre attivato la mailing-list, iscrivendoti riceverai via e-mail le informazioni e le novità che riguardano i 99 Posse e l'etichetta.
 Vieni a visitarci!!!
luca@novenove.it
<http://www.novenove.it>

+++ **SILKE BISCHOFF** are now called **18 SUMMERS** !!! +++

NEWS ~ NEWS ~ NEWS ~ NEWS ~
 NEWS ~ NEWS ~ NEWS ~ NEWS

+++ **18 SUMMERS** +++

The new album of 18 SUMMERS will be released in May. Behind this name are well-known names in the scene, FELIX FLAUCHER and FRANK SCHWER, formerly known as SILKE BISCHOFF!!! Please notice, that this is not a new band or sideproject of Silke Bischoff musicians! Its is simply new labeled, everything else remains the same and will be just better than ever! The change of their band name didn't hurt or change the sound of Germany's no.1 Goth-pop-acoustic band at all. The upcoming album was again produced together with John Fryer and Roman Schönsee, like the previous

release "Phoenix from the flames". The two musicians, Felix and Frank, get supported this time by an additional string quartet. Expect another amazing artwork and mastermind FELIX FLAUCHER delivers once more outstanding photos for the forthcoming album.

+ **RELEASE DATE: 27. May 2002 (e-wave/BMG)** +

And from Dream Disciples:

Spring Sale

Wooo Hooo :) we have a sale on all our cds for the duration of the Springtime, for your bargain B+Q style prices, please visit the merchandise page at :
<http://www.darkcelldigitalmusic/dreamdisciples> to get your grubbies on all our heavily discounted discs.

We have more stock in of the Cartoon skinny fits and are selling CD's from just 5.99 for the duration of the sale.

Theatre of Tragedy have now released their new album 'Assembly,' now available in most good shops. No room in the end to review it in this edition, but it will be in the next one, and I can certainly say ahead of time that it is **BRILLIANT**. Other artists who have sent me material not featured here will also have to wait for the next issue of *SS* to see your review now owing to something of a backlog.

WAVE-GOTIK-TREFFEN

This year it will be held, as usual, in Leipzig from the 17-27th May and will feature amongst other things, Moonspell, Silke Bischoff, Alien Sex

Fiend, Diamanda Galas, Suicide Commando, Soft Cell, The Mission S.P.O.C.K., Ataraxia, Clan of Xymox, Fading Colours and many other lesser-and-better-known bands.
 Info: 0371-5228347
www.wave-gotik-treffen.de

Store.' Email address is
sales@musicnonstop.co.uk

It stocks all the latest new releases, has info on merchandise and concert tickets, CD-rom catalogue available on request, booklet includes club listings in the UK.

German Gothic zine **Totem** are still regularly producing an A5 publication; the most recent one included interviews with Crux Shadows, Fetus, Morbid Poetry, Berliners Scream Silence, and Italy's Human Disease. Also reviews of CD's, zines and cult/fantasy films. Good to see there is still a small press of this kind in existence.

Contact address:

TOTEM
 C/O K. Hoog
 Postfach 4401 39
 12001 Berlin
totem-magazin@01019freenet.de

In **Budapest** meanwhile, a new gothic shop has opened for business. Named **Gabriel**, it is situated at Nemart, 7th District, Szövetség Ucta 23. Quality clothes made to your specifications, ready-made items in shop, including lace gloves, knick-knacks etc, plus zines, CD's. Contact me for more details if calling from abroad.

Budapest's only nightclub remains the Voodoo, literally from dusk till dawn, contact DJ Gelka for more details at tajtlapgelka@nexus.hu
 Usually a local band is hosted at these events too.

Want to know what is going on in Scotland? Write and subscribe to the Edinburgh listing, go to
Nightnews@coffinrock.com

A new mail-order store has opened in the UK, called 'The Alternative Music

Tracks by: Ataraxia, Vidi Aquam, GOR, Black Sun,
Pavor Nocturnus, Dj Antz: Trincea e molti altri
<http://go.to/rosaselvaggia>
e-mail: ikita@tin.it

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reviews, poetry, and more